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The Editors' Table.

Our readers are reminded that the Reflector is published weekly, on Thursdays, at No. 11 Cornhill, Boston.

EXPLANATIONS.—A Sequel to 'Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation.' By the author of that work. New York: Wiley & Putnam. 1846. This is a volume of one hundred and forty-two pages, of clear, open type, on fine white paper, neatly bound in cloth, but with *uncut* leaves. The former work of the author met with a warm reception in the world of letters. It was severely handled by the reviews. He has therefore been induced to take up the pen for the purpose of endeavoring to make good what is deficient, and re-asserting and confirming whatever has been unjustly challenged in his previous book. Those who have read the 'Vestiges,' and its reviews, and desire to know how the author replies to the objections arrayed against it, can here have their curiosity satisfied.

Men Accountable for their Faith.

'The Biblical Repository and Princeton Review' for January, 1846, has come to hand. The titles of its articles are, 'The Law of Human Progress—Struther's History of the Relief Church—Accountability of men for their Faith—The Original State of Man—The Raising of Lazarus—Cott's Puritanism—Theories of the Church—Attraction of the Cross, and Short Notices. From the third article, we make the following extracts:

It is contended, that we cannot be held responsible for our opinions, because they are irresistibly determined by the evidence in view of the mind, and are wholly independent of the will. In the words of the author himself: 'those states of the understanding which we term belief, doubt, and disbelief, inasmuch as they are voluntary, nor the result of any exertion of the will, imply neither merit nor demerit in him who is the object of them. Whatever be the state of a man's understanding in relation to any possible proposition, it is a state or affection devoid equally of desert or culpability. The nature of an opinion cannot make it criminal. In relation to the same subject, one may believe, and another doubt, and a third disbelieve, and all with equal innocence.' Here, as well as in other places, the broad ground is assumed by the author, that no error of opinion, however great, can imply any demerit in the subject of it; and that one man may adopt, and another may reject, any conceivable proposition, and yet both be equally innocent. This ground is as broad as that taken in a recent work by Lord Brougham, who supposes that Voltaire may have been perfectly fair and honest in his inquiries after truth, although he happened to come to the conclusion that there is no God. Even this monstrous opinion, if we may believe the writer in question, implies no demerit in him who is the subject of it. We propose to examine the reasoning on which this position is founded.

However plausible it may appear at first, it is liable to several insuperable objections, besides being radically unsound in itself. In the first place, it may be used with exactly the same degree of plausibility to show, that we are not accountable for our affections. Love and hate are involuntary, as independent of the will as belief. As the latter is determined by the evidence in view of the mind, so the former are determined by the object under contemplation. If an object, however amiable and lovely in itself, should happen to excite our aversion, it is no more in the power of the will, by an immediate exertion of it, to prevent such an emotion, than it is, by a like effort, to resist the influence of evidence. If there is no free agency in the one case, there is none in the other. Hence, the same kind of logic, which the Essay employs to absolve us from all accountability on the score of belief, may be, and indeed often has been employed, to demolish the whole foundation of human responsibility.

In the second place, when it is said, that belief is involuntary and does not depend on the will, the language is ambiguous, and deceives by its ambiguity. It is true, that belief is independent of the will, in one sense; but in another, it is, in many cases, most absolutely dependent upon it. With evidence in view of the mind, it is impossible by an immediate exertion of the will, to resist the influence of that evidence. Opinion, it is admitted, is wholly born of the evidence, a direct act of volition. Yet, by bringing all the arguments and lights within our reach, to bear upon the mind, we may induce ourselves to believe some things, rather than their opposite. This we may do in relation to all those questions, on the side of which is more strongly supported by evidence than the other. All that is necessary to control our belief, right in such cases, is a steady and supreme regard for truth. Hence, it clearly appears that belief does, in regard to the class of questions above mentioned, depend upon the will, upon a virtuous exercise of the will.

Here the question arises, is this mediate dependence of belief on the will, the only kind of dependence required, to render us accountable for what we believe? The answer must appear obvious, if we only consider how few of those things for which we are accountable can be accomplished by an immediate exercise of the will. You cannot gratify a single appetite, or produce a single change in the external world, by a direct act of volition. You cannot hurt the hair of a

man's head by such an effort of the will; but take a suitable weapon, and you may destroy his life. Now, who would say, that because such an act is independent of an immediate exertion of the will, you would not be accountable for its perpetration? Who would say, that you would not be to blame for the commission of murder, because it was not in your power to execute it, by a direct, or immediate act of volition, but that you were under the necessity of using a deadly weapon in order to accomplish your purpose? Every body must see, at the first glance, that such a position would be absurd; yet it is precisely the position assumed by those who contend, that a man is not accountable for his belief, because he cannot control it by a direct act of the will, and most resort to the use of means in order to do so.

In the foregoing remarks, we have taken it for granted, that there are some opinions which have a preponderance of evidence in their favor; and that it is only necessary to examine them with a fair and candid mind, to be compelled to assent to them. But this supposition may be denied. Indeed the author of the Essay in question, expressly declares, that there is no subject about which two men, equally upright and sincere in pursuit of truth, may not arrive at opposite conclusions. It is not wonderful that after such a declaration, he should be so strenuous in denying that we are accountable for our belief. After having declared all opinions to be equally uncertain, it is not too late for the author to hold up any dogma as unquestionably true!

It is difficult to conceive that the advocate of such a doctrine is not trifling with his fellow-men. He tells them, in effect, that notwithstanding all he may advance in favor of his own doctrine, another individual, equally dexterous with himself, might say just as much against it. He proclaims to the world, that however it may be with others, the search after truth is not a serious business with himself; and that if any thing should happen to appear more true than another, it is only because it has been so fortunate as to enlist a more adroit special advocate in its favor. It is not because it is really more true in itself. He does, indeed, turn the work of his own hand into ridicule, and send it out into the world labelled with the jest—'Herein is contained a very rational belief, that there is no rational belief.'

According to the doctrine of the author, nothing is certain to the human mind. All things are involved in clouds and darkness. The most sacred truths, if any truths there be, are involved in terminable doubt. The most glorious objects in the universe are imperceptibly veiled from mortal vision. The Father of mercies, if any such being there be, has left us without guide or compass. We are poor, miserable creatures, wandering up and down in a world of gloom and sadness, we know not whither, without one ray of light from the world above to illumine our path and cheer our path. Nature itself shrinks back, with instinctive horror, from the intolerable gloom of such a scepticism, and needs not the aid of logic to see and feel its intrinsic hideousness and deformity.

Christ Human and Divine.

Christ lived, moreover, in obedience to the laws of human nature. So far as his mental operations could be observed, they evidently followed the ordinary course of human thought and feeling. His mental development came with the growth of his body. Although in the temple at twelve years of age, he gave proof of extraordinary intellectual virtue, perhaps of superhuman knowledge, yet the tenor of his mental movements was the same as that of the human mind. His discourses gave the ordinary signs of logical connection, which appear in the natural processes of well regulated human minds. His conceptions came in such succession as holds in human minds by the laws of association; and when he spoke as never man spoke, his peculiarity arose from the nature of his doctrine, and not from the method of his thought. His instructions were largely suggested by occasions. His trains of thought, like those of man, often took their direction from objects of sense. When he heard of the massacre of certain Galileans, he called up the analogous case of the eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell, and gave the narrative as naturally suggested by those events. When he hears his disciples strive for places of honor, he gives general instructions on humility. When he sees a rich man who loves his possessions, he says to his disciples, take heed and beware of covetousness. He felt compassion for an unhappy youth when he saw him; for the erring multitude while looking around upon them. He wept for Jerusalem while he beheld the city. He went near to a fig-tree to see whether it bore fruit. He commended his mother and John to one another, when he saw them standing by the cross. He rejected the bitter draught when he had tasted its bitterness.

These simple, unobtrusive signs of humanity in our Saviour are to be coupled, in the one case, there is no free agency in the one case, there is none in the other. Hence, the same kind of logic, which the Essay employs to absolve us from all accountability on the score of belief, may be, and indeed often has been employed, to demolish the whole foundation of human responsibility.

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kind within our knowledge; the man Christ Jesus. We have no common name for him, because we have no class of persons like him to designate by a common name. We may call him Jesus, Christ, Son of Man, Son of God; whatever name he applies to himself, whatever name we choose as the sign of our conception of his person. We need no common name for that which does not belong to any class.

The Price of Opinion in Olden Times.

The Antiquarian and General Review, comprising whatever is useful and instructive in Ecclesiastical or Historical Antiquities; serving as a book of useful reference on subjects of research and curiosity. Edited by William Arthur. Schoenectady, N. Y. Jan., 1846. A pamphlet of pp. 24, containing concise information from the records of the past. A work, on a more enlarged plan, of the above title should be a true description, could not fail of being extremely entertaining and instructive. As specimens of the matter contained in the number before us, we select the following. In an article upon Dr. Parr who lived to be one hundred and fifty-two years, and nine months old, it is said:—

He hath outlived many sectaries and heretics; for, in the thirty-second year of the reign of King Henry the Eighth, 1540, the third of May, three anabaptists were burnt in the high-way, between Southwark and Newington. In the fourth year of King Edward the Sixth, one George of Paris, a Dutchman, was burnt in Smithfield, for being an Armin heretic, 1551; 1558, one John Lewis denied the godhead of Christ, and was burnt at Norwich, in the twenty-sixth year of Elizabeth. Not long before that, there was one Joan Butcher, alias, Joan of Kent, burned for the like.

In the third year of Queen Elizabeth's reign, one William Geoffrey named John Moore to be Christ; but they were both whipped out of that presumptuous opinion, 1561.

In the seventeenth of Queen Elizabeth, the sect of the family of love began, 1575, but it took no deep root.

In the twenty-first of Queen Elizabeth, one Matthew Hunt was burnt at Norwich for denying Christ to be our Saviour. In the thirty-third of Queen Elizabeth, one William Hacket was hanged for professing himself to be Christ, 1591.

In the ninth year of King James, the eleventh of April, 1611, one Edward Wightman was burned at Litchfield for Arrianism.

Light in the Midst of Darkness.

The following graphic description of an imposing Popish custom, by which the imaginations of the faithful are captivated, and their passions aroused, through the medium of their senses, is taken from 'Headley's Letters from Italy.' A sprinkling of keen irony gives it a spicy flavor.

It is a principle in all Catholic ceremonies, never to wind off gradually, as is so frequently the case with the Protestants, but to have the last display the most magnificent of all. Thus, on Easter Sunday, the closing up of Holy week, the Papal throne crowds its entire pomp into ceremonies, and, as during the day, the interior of St. Peter's has done its utmost to magnify his Holiness, so at night the exterior must do its share of glorification. This great building, covering several acres, is illuminated on its entire outer surface. It is caused by suspending four thousand four hundred lanterns upon it, covering it from the dome down. To accomplish this, men have to be let down with ropes over every part of the edifice, and let dangling there for more than an hour. Even from the base of the church, they look like insects creeping over the surface. Hanging down from the sides of the interior dome, hanging down from the four hundred feet high in the air, is attended with no such danger, that the eighty men employed in it, always receive extreme unction before they attempt it. The last sacrament is taken, and their accounts settled both for this world and the next, so that death would not, after all, be so great a calamity. The Pope must amuse the people, and glorify his reign, though he hazards human life in doing it. But he has the magnanimity to secure the sufferer in the next world. If a rope break, and the man is crushed into a shapeless mass on the pavement below, his soul immediately ascends to one of the most favored seats in paradise. He fell from God's church—he died in the attempt to illuminate it, and in obedience to the Pope's viceregent of earth. How can the man help being saved! But to make assurance doubly sure, the Pope gives him a passport with his own hand, which he declares St. Peter, who sits by the celestial gates, will most fully recognize. This is very kind of the Pope. If he kills a man, he sends him to heaven, and secures him a recompense in the next world for all he has lost in this. The ignorant creature who is willing to undertake the perilous operation for the sake of a few dollars wherewith to feed his children, believes it all, and fearlessly swings in mid heaven, where the yielding of a strand of the rope would precipitate him where the very form of humanity would be crushed out of him.

But one forgets all this in looking at the illuminations, which it is impossible to describe. There are two illuminations. The first is called the silver one, and commences about eight o'clock in the evening. Four thousand four hundred lamps are so arranged as to reveal the entire architecture of the building. Every column, cornice, frieze and window—all the details of the building, and the entire structure, are revealed in a soft clear light, producing an effect indescribably pleasing, yet utterly bewildering. It seems an immense alabaster building, lit from within. The long lines of light made by the columns, with the shadows between—the beautiful cornice glittering over the darkness, undisturbed by the light—these magnificent colonnades all inherent with light, and every one of the one hundred and ninety-two statues along its top surmounted with a lamp, and the immense dome rising over all like a mountain of molten silver, in the deep darkness around, so completely delude the sense that one can think of nothing but a fairy fabric, resplendent with light and color. This effect, however, is given only when one stands at a distance. The Pincian hill is the spot from which to view it. All around is buried in deep darkness, except that steadily shining glory. Not a sound is heard to break the stillness, and you gaze, and gaze, expecting every moment to see the beautiful vision fade. But it still shines calmly on.

This illumination lasts from eight to nine, and just as the bell of the Cathedral strikes nine, sending its loud and solemn peal over the city, a thousand four hundred and seventy-five torches are suddenly kindled, besides the lanterns. The change is instantaneous, and almost terrific. The air seems to water and fire in the sudden light, and the form and form are lost for a moment, and the vision which just charmed your senses is melted and flowing together. The next moment, old St. Peter's again draws its burning outline against the black sky, and stands like a mountain of torches in the deep night, with a fiery cross burning at the top. How the glorious structure burns, yet unconsumed! The flames wrap it in their fierce embrace, and yet not a single detail is lost in the conflagration. There is the noble facade in all its harmony, and yet on fire. There are the immense colonnades warring in the light, changed only in that they are now each a red nether shaft. The statues stand unburned, and all fiery figures. The dome is a vast fire-belt in the darkness, and its distinct outline is as clear as at the first. The whole mighty edifice is there, but built of flame—columns, frieze, cornice, windows, domes, cross—a temple of fire, perfect in every part, flashing, swaying, burning in mid heaven. The senses grow bewildered in gazing on its intense brilliancy, and the judgment pronounces an optical illusion, unreal, fantastical. Yet the next moment it stands corrected—that is St. Peter's flaming, unwavering, in the murky heavens. Hour after hour it blazes on, and the last torch is yet unextinguished when the grey twilight of morning opens in the east. This you say is a glorious spectacle; yes, but it is on Sabbath evening—the successor of the apostle—the spiritual head of the church—the viceregent of God on earth has sanctified the Sabbath by this glorious illumination in honor of the Son of God! What a preposterous idea, what a magnificent folly! And do you think the modern Roman is to do complete a fool as to believe in the propriety and religion of all this? By no means. He admires and enjoys the spectacle, then sneers when it is over.

Perhaps his Holiness and college of cardinals might present this as illustrative or symbolical of the truth that the church is the light of the world. It is the world illuminating the church, not the church, the world. It is light upon it, not in it. Decayed wood and corrupted flesh, shine in the dark, and what is all this magnificent nocturnal display, but the phosphorescence of moral putrefaction.

Original and Select.

For the Christian Reflector.

Has the Character of our Ministry Changed?

[The following communication is from a venerable father in the ministry, who, in consequence of his extensive acquaintance with the clergy of his past and present generation, and his habit of observing the signs of the times, is well qualified to form an intelligent and correct opinion of the subject upon which he writes. The article is replete with sound common sense.]

Messrs. Editors.—The state of religion in our churches for two or three years past, has led to much inquiry and thought about the causes of the declension which prevails in the cause of the Redeemer, and to different theories by different men, and perhaps none have fully opened the reasons of it; certainly, none have removed it. In the inquiries which have been made on this subject, as might be expected, the influence and character of our preaching and preachers have not failed to be considered. That some ground for complaint in the progress or declension of religion, may be traced to an aged minister, spoke of the ministry of the present time as far behind that which preceded it in its spirituality. Since that, a young pastor has admitted the fact, and asked in what the difference consists, that he may improve his preaching in relation to that deficiency. The spirit and inquiries of that young pastor naturally develop a commendable humility, and a desire to do as good as our fathers. In other writings, if not directly in the Reflector, it is represented that some of our ministers do not honor the holy office which they sustain. These are represented as having been led to enter the ministry from unholy motives, without the requisite talent, unable to obtain mastery over their own minds, and without the piety so essential to an efficient ministry. That there may be some foundation for such representations in particular cases, I do not pretend to deny, but these cases are rare. But this seems not to me, to be peculiar to our own times; this is an imperfect world, and all of us are imperfect. But it is a question whether we are wise in magnifying our deficiencies. There are those who have a deep interest in depreciating the characters and talents of evangelical ministers. They do it for the purpose of destroying their influence and the cause which they advocate. It seems to me that instead of undervaluing, we should stand by and encourage each other. By these prefatory remarks, it will be seen that there are several topics which might be discussed, and on each of which I may perhaps say something. In this communication, I shall confine myself to the alleged want of spirituality of our ministry at the present time. That there is some ground for the complaint of your aged correspondent, I shall not wholly deny, though not to the extent by him represented. I should think that the preaching of our present ministry was not so plain an exhibition of the doctrines of the Bible in general, as that of our fathers, nor is our preaching so practical, less doctrinal, and less experimental. Of course, there is less on the state and character of man as a lost sinner, and less

the great work of redemption. If you could compare the preaching of olden times with that of the present, you would see that the former was more Biblical than the latter. I once asked the late excellent Mr. Collier, who of two eminent ministers then living, whom he had heard, but I had not, was the greatest preacher? He answered, that if I meant to ask which of them more clearly, forcibly and meltingly expounded and illustrated God's Holy Word, Dr. B. was incomparably the ablest; but if I meant to ask which was the most eloquent writer and speaker, Dr. S. was eminently the superior; and there is, in my judgment, that difference between the old and the new. I have heard the examinations of young men who have been through a collegiate and theological course of education, that did not after all know half as much about the living truths of God's Word, as some others who had enjoyed but very little of those advantages. Though I make this distinction, yet we have ministers who are eminent preachers of God's Holy Word—men of prayer. I have recently read two sermons, that seemed to be such sermons as our fathers would have delighted to hear. And I have, within a few years, heard several sermons with which even Paul would have been delighted. I of course have but little opportunity to hear preaching, but from what I have heard, I think that in many of our pulpits Jesus Christ is clearly held up to the people, crucified and slain. But I confess that I have heard and seen some sermons, of which I could say so much. I think of one which uses good words, but they do not seem to be clothed with the power of the Holy Ghost. And some that I have heard did not seem to enter into his spirit of spiritual preaching. The style of much of our preaching, from our educated men, seems to me to be wanting in strength. I recently read a production of one of our most eloquent men, that seemed to me to have in it too many smooth, beautiful words. Much of the preaching of our fathers was characterized by fearless earnestness, that is not so common now as then. Some of the old preachers, and indeed most of them, were so occupied with other things than the ministry, in order to obtain a living, that much of their preaching was not such as would now be very interesting to most of our hearers, but it had a highly religious character, and indicated that the preachers, if they had not read many other books, had much thumbed their Bibles on their knees. The fact is, the circumstances of our fathers compelled them to live to God, and made them less influenced by the world, and more by the Spirit of God. The Baptists of this Commonwealth, fifty, and indeed thirty years ago, were held in far different estimation from what they are now. At that time, no one suggested or thought that a Baptist would, or ought, to be Governor of Massachusetts. But how changed the times, when we have a Governor, and another candidate for that high office. Never were there such a remarkable alteration in any other denomination or people, without a corresponding alteration in its ministry. The honorable and easy circumstances which we are now placed, do have an influence on the present ministry of our denomination. In point of intellectual and literary improvement, our ministry is vastly above what it was thirty or forty years ago. This has led the new ministers, in some cases, to disesteem the fathers, while they were men of whom the world was not worthy. Comparison is sometimes dangerous, where the subject is so tender, and sometimes contrived us. Much thumbed their Bibles on their knees. 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